Actor Managers Make Season's Debut on Broadway.

By Franklyn Fyles

NEW YORK, Oct. 16.—Two of our actor managers—that is to say, star actors absolute and independent in the choice of plays for their own use and in the production thereof—have this week made their first Broadway achievements of the season. Edward H. Sothern did it with "The Proud Prince," and Richard Mansfield with "Old Heidelberg." A large number of stage women enjoy wills and ways of their own as to what they shall do and how they shall do it, but the only other man than Sothern and Mansfield in the Broadway class, who backs his own judgment with his own money in new ventures, is James K. Hackett. However, most of the exploited heads of theatrical companies have an influence, often a deciding one, in the selection of fiction in which to figure. One of these is William Collier—and just now he is being blamed not only, but harshly berated, for rejecting good comedies and accepting poor ones—as if an error in such a matter did not of itself bring sufficient punishment in loss of money and prestige. Two dramatists, Henry Blossom and Edwin Milton Royle, being no more than human, are no doubt gleeful in their hearts, because they wrote for him "Checkers" and "My Wife's Husbands," and he declined them; yet they have prospered since in New York and are now off on tours. His preference was "Are You My Father?" which is so positive a failure that it will be on and off the stage all within ten days. Thomas H. Broadhurst would be a third author to be glad of Collier's misfortune, as he, too, wrote a play—"A Fool and His Money"—which the willful comedian would have none of; but this piece, like the others, has done well with another actor, and now it is to be transferred to the now tractable Collier. No actor is more interesting to other actors than young Willie Collier, because he is personally popular among them, and they believe his cleverness and individuality as a light comedian should, and must, make him a favorite with the general public.

So my readers will never see "Are You My Father?" as it will have gone to limbo by the time this account of it is in print. It is a transcript from Captain Marryat's novel, "Japhet in Search of a Father," in which a foundling hunts high and low for his male parent. Mr. Collier saw the humor of Japhet's quest of lineage, but he overlooked the fact that Marryat's books are obsolete; that their fun is far bygone in manner, and that their Englishmen of half a century ago are absurd to our eyes in their bright colored and odd shaped garments and hats. Collier's specialty is the portrayal of the glib-spoken, quick-witted, rather audacious joker of the very latest American development. As the plodding dunce in the Marryat story he was manacled and fettered too heavily to move more than sluggishly. The first audience contained fully a hundred friendly players, and they applauded cheerily during the first act; but at the end of the second most of them filed solemnly out, like mourners at a funeral, and did not return for another look at the corpse. Not less than $10,000 of the money of his managers, Weber & Fields, is buried with the remains, but they are too rich themselves, and too hopeful of Collier, to mind the loss very much.

Mr. Sothern is bravely perverse against advice in the investment of his capital in enterprises of his own choosing. He was admonished when he mortgaged his residence to put money into an ornate representation of "Hamlet," that his hard-earned savings would be sunk too deep to ever rise to sight again. But they did come up to the surface and float prosperously. His present offer of costly entertainment is uncommonly risky, as the play, "The Proud Prince," may be regarded as pious or impious, according to one's religious point of view. It has a mere basis in Longfellow's poem on the legend of Robert of Sicily, the very bad king who became very good, but not till he had been punished into penitence dreadfully. The play, by Justin Huntly McCarthy, is a florid melodrama, much like those Christian pieces which Wilson Barrett used to bring to us from London, with their shrewdly audacious blends of religion and lechery, in which a heaven-defying young despot pursued a Christian maiden till he got her, and then was brought to repentance by divine wrath and the girl's love. My own fallible judgment is that Mr. Sothern will place "The Proud Prince" in the class of plays which, although condemned here and there by a clergyman, still appeal irresistibly to church people. To be sure, its representation of a Sicilian brothel, with its Cleopatra of a keeper lolling luxuriously on a canopied bed, and a dozen young courtesans lying around her, is an astounding exhibition of vice in splendor; and the trade of these creatures is discussed in far plainer and plentier words than I am using in this brief description; but the Christianity, which by contrast it illustrates, is kept carefully in the spectacle. Religionists have not recoiled from the shows of sensuous pleasure and sin-now, as he used to in "Prince Karl," he makes his ful indulgence in "Ben Hur," but have swelled and multiplied its audiences beyond those of any theatrical entertainment ever put on the American stage.

The Christian lesson taught by Mr. Sothern and Mr. McCarthy is not to be doubted. King Robert is robustly carnal, fiendishly cruel and awfully blasphemous at the outset. He defies God and challenges him to a competitive test of power. Thereupon a statute of an archangel steps out alive from a niche in a church and pronounces a doom of torturing degredation. For that purpose a miracle is wrought. The "proud prince" is transformed from comeliness of person and richness of raiment to the exact counterpart of his hunchbacked and ugly-faced court jester, and in that semblance his assertions of royalty are received with kicks, cuffs and still harsher tokens of contumely. This change from a man as presentable as Jekyll, to one as hideous as Hyde is wrought with the best of mechanical stagecraft. A storm of wind, thunder and lightning begins when the archangel comes to life and it rises to tremendous fury. I have never seen a closer imitation of nature in convulsion. While the elements rage with blinding and deafening phenomena, the prince falls to the ground in terror, and when the storm ceases we see that he has become a counterpart of the malformed and horrifying jester, who has fled from his wrath into the forest. The matinee girls won't dote on Sothern during his metamorphosis, which lasts till the end of the play, when he expiates his crimes by trying to die at the stake in the place of the beloved maiden and is restored to his former personality and the throne. But we who take account of his acting will admire it, even when it is measured by Edwin Booth's well-remembered art in "The Fool's Revenge." This severe test is easy to apply, because the jester's feint of jollity to cover the escape of a girl from a royal debauchee is essentially the same in both dramas.

Necessarily, Mr. McCarthy has added much to the legend which Longfellow rhymed to provide enough material for a full-length drama. The playwright has gone to the stage for suggestions. The trick of the "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" change in the dim view of the audience; the frenzied antics of the jester, as in "The Fool's Revenge," and the splendidly-couched siren, as in "Cleopatra," are but three among many unoriginal inspirations that include the luring away of the heroine with a lute, as in "The Pied Piper of Hamelin," and things in "Nero," "Quo Vadis" and many another play of the early Christian age. But the assembly of these ideas is dextrous and the writing is good literature associated with theatric art. Now let us gossip extraneously. McCarthy was once and awhile the husband of Cecelia Loftus, who impersonated the heroine in his "If I were King," and is now again with Sothern in "The Proud Prince." They were divorced years ago, yet he is said to have written his latest heroine to suit her limit of ability. It is this fitted-to-measure role which enables Cissy, as she called herself in vaudeville, to be delightfully satisfactory for the first time as a dramatic actress. In the variety shows she may never have received $1,000 a week, as was asserted, but I don't doubt she was paid half that salary, as mimics of her skill are scarce. Professionally ambitious was Cissy, however, and stubbornly persistent, though changefully erratic in some other respects, and she took an engagement with Sothern at no more, probably, than $150, which even her present success in the legitimate portrayal of a character will hardly raise to $200. She is being rewarded with admiration, so white, gentle and loving does she make the Christian maiden. When she declares that the only men she has ever seen are her father, the deformed jester and some monks, you are ready to believe that she is telling the truth about Cissy as well as Perpetua.

Mr. Mansfield paddled his own theatrical craft from the time when it was no more than a canoe, with "Prince Karl," until it was built up to a big and proud Shakespearean ship. He is as bold as Sothern, or bolder. The fact is that "Old Heidelberg" failed here flatly last winter is an English adaptation, which presumably put it into a shape most favorable to New York success. He has taken up the seemingly ruined German drama by William Meyer-Foster and risked his annual Broadway engagement on a literal translation of it. It was by first believing in himself that he led the public to believe in him as a dramatic artist. Often he has disappointed expectation; indeed, he always does in Shakespearean roles; but he never fails in the delineation of living and moving human beings whose motives and acts are of today. The principal person in the play he is now using is a petty German prince, born to a throne and restrictively reared to occupy it becomingly—an unhappy prisoner of state, and knowing naught of the joys of youthful comradeship until he breaks away from the palace and goes to Heidelberg for education. Mansfield had a German mother, and partly a German rearing; so mimic German a sufficiently real German to place in his gallery of dramatic portraiture.

It is hard to write readably about the ordinary new comic operas, so much alike are they, and so much made up of separate small things. An example is "The Fisher Maiden," with almost the dullest libretto and almost the brightest music that have been put lately into a show of the extravaganza order. The infectious songs are numerous. I caught them last night, and I feel them in my system this morning, trying to break out. The composer is Harry Von Tilzer, who has grown rich as a maker of and dealer in popular ballads. This business venture is his own, too, and it looks as though he has kept a choice lot of ditties out of stock till he has advertised them by theatrical introduction. They have the usual range of sentiment and frolic, and they are projected in the play with backings of dancing chorus women. They are the sum and substance of the entertainment, and their singers have been hired for their good voices and clear enunciation. If half a dozen out of the two dozen get into public demand, Mr. Von Tilzer will recover all his cash investment by traffic in them, and have much of the theatre income for clear profit. That is a commercial view to take of "The Fisher Maiden," but the art and literature in it are not appreciable. A salient point is the open and undisguised imitation of Gilbert and Sullivan, especially in several patter songs, such as Sir Joseph's in "Pinafore" and the Lord Chancellor's in "Iolanthe," and they jingle so much like the originals in words and tunes that Von Tilzer ought to ease his conscience by paying royalty to the estates of the two English masters of comic opera.

Mrs. Fiske and McKee Rankin are exhibiting new studies of character—the one depicting Henrik Ibsen's "Hedda Gabler," and the other Thomas N. Page's "Marse Chan." Mrs. Fiske's achievement is one of those brave things that she does with ideas all her own, and often differing from those of the author. In this instance the reviewers agree that she represents with ruthless repellance, and an artistic spirit, the unpleasant traits of a woman gone terribly astray. Mrs. Fiske has a following who will permit her to make such departures from the beaten way and appreciate them. Mr. Rankin has made, not a play, but a monologue, from Mr. Page's narrative of a southern negro. The other characters are two women who do little except listen to the loquacious negro. This is done in vaudeville.

AN EDITOR'S AMBITION GRATIFIED.

"One afternoon at Salt Lake I went into the Oregon Short Line office to buy a berth in the Pullman car leaving that night for Nampa," said "Ed" Howe, in giving for the Atchison Globe an account of his travels in the west. "The agent hadn't a lower, and I hate an upper, so I indulged in an extravagance I have long dreamed of—I bought a stateroom! I thus had, from 9 o'clock at night until 6 o'clock the next afternoon, a room with every modern convenience. The porter asked if I wanted the bed made with both mattresses, and I said I did, supposing that was the usual thing with the heavy swells. And the bed, made with both mattresses, turned out to be a good one. Besides, I was enabled to undress and dress in the usual way; I not only had the upper berth up, but had a big sofa in front of my bed. Also a lavatory of my own, and complete privacy. It was an experience I greatly enjoyed. You will not believe it, but a Pullman porter has a great deference for a passenger in the stateroom. When he enters he knocks at the door very humbly. The train conductor and the brakeman also seem to stand in awe of a passenger in the stateroom. The stateroom in the sleeper and the dining car are where the trainmen take off their hats. A train conductor will walk into a Pullman crowded with ladies, and keep his hat on, but when he walks through a dining car or into the stateroom of a Pullman he always takes off his hat."

A Personal Bill of Fare.

A squire of Andover once hired a brother of Patrick, who was in his employ. The terms were made with Pat before his brother's arrival and the following conversation ensued:

Squire—I'll pay your brother $1.50 a day, Patrick.

Patrick (bowing and smiling)—Yes, sor; yes, sor; and will he ate himsilf or will ye ate him, sor?

The squire thought that Dennis had better eat himself.

Ready for the Debut.

(Judge.)

"Yes," says the proud mother, "if I do say it myself, there isn't another girl in society who has been so thoroughly schooled and who has enjoyed so many of the preliminary advantages. She has had the appendicitis, has spent two years in a rest-cure, has gone on six sea trips for exhaustion, has had seven attacks of nervous prostration, has been written up in the papers as about to elope with the coachman, and has been proposed to by ten foreign musicians, and eight noblemen have looked her up in the financial agencies. Now that she is about to make her debut I see no reason why she should not become a great favorite if complete preparation has anything to do with it."

Physiological Error.

(Kansas City Journal.)

"It says in dis paper dat a feller wot broke out o' jail was shot through de v-i-t-a-l-s Wot does that mean?"

"T'rough de victuals. Dey must 'a' plugged him in de stomach."

"But dey had chased him two days an' he hadn't had not'in' to eat."

"Den de paper's wrong. It oughter said he was shot t'rough de appetite."

AMERICAN WOMEN ARE COLD.

Paris—American lovers are cold. This is the newest discovery of Jules Huret, the Parisian newspaper writer, now sojourning in America. He doubts that all marriages are for love, and not for the bride's dot, as is claimed. He has seen too many exceptions.

M. Huret notes that it is a difficult matter to distinguish fiances in America because of the coldness in their manner toward each other. Their impassability astounds him. The French, he says, may not love more than the Americans, but at least their love is more evident.

"American girls," the critic finds, "care too much for quantity in dress. Observe the huge bouquets of violets at $10 a bunch, that they wear, glued to their belts. These flowers in no wise improve the contour of their figure, but they do not consult aesthetics, but run after quantity." Among curious types M. Huret has found two which particularly struck him. One is an old business man of 87, who could hardly walk, but had himself carried downtown every day for the pleasure of breathing the busy air of that quarter. The other is a chorus girl who had a box at every one of all the champagne corks that have popped at different suppers she has attended, each carefully labeled with the date of its "pop."